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(Provisional Agenda item 6(a))

COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(Commission decision F (48))

Report by the Executive Secretary

1. The Commission has formally adopted sustainable development as a guiding principle for all relevant activities of the UN/ECE. Pursuant to paragraph 1 of decision F (48), ECE Principal Subsidiary Bodies are promoting this principle by integrating environmental concerns and considerations into their projects and programmes. They are also taking into account, in elaborating their programmes of work, relevant conclusions and recommendations contained in the documents of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in particular Agenda 21. In accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/191, the ECE Action Plan to Implement Agenda 21, which received the general approval of the Senior Advisers on Environmental and Water Problems, will be transmitted to the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development at its second session in May 1994 (paragraph 6 of decision F (48)) as part of a joint submission by the five regional commissions.

2. Five member countries and the European Community have ratified or acceded to the 1991 Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. Three member countries have ratified or acceded to the 1992 Convention on Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. Five member countries have ratified or acceded to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (paragraph 2 of decision F (48)).

3. The second Sulphur Protocol related to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution is expected to be finalized in early March 1994. A special session at Ministerial level of the Executive body for the Convention is planned to be held in Oslo in June 1994 at the invitation of the Norwegian Government. The Executive Body at its eleventh session decided that after the finalization of the Sulphur Protocol highest priority should be given to the development of a strategy for the second step of the Protocol on nitrogen oxides. Twenty-three member countries and the European Union had signed the Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution concerning the Control of Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds or their Transboundary Fluxes by 31 December 1993, and five countries have ratified the protocol thus far (paragraph 4 of decision F (48)).

4. For the purpose of improved implementation and verification, specific non-compliance provisions have been included into the draft second Sulphur Protocol. Work programmes are being elaborated under the implementation of the three recent ECE environmental conventions, pending their entry into force aimed at strengthening the capabilities of future parties to comply with obligations under these conventions (paragraph 3 of decision F (48)).

5. The Senior Advisers at their special session on 21 October 1993 established the Working Group of Senior Governmental Officials "Environment for Europe" to carry out the tasks mandated by the Ministerial Conference held in April 1993 in Lucerne (Switzerland). The Working Group will serve as the central coordinating body for the further development of the "Environment for Europe" process. It will oversee the follow-up to the Lucerne Ministerial Conference, supervise the substantive preparations for the next Ministerial Conference (Sofia, 1995), and pursue the further development of the Environmental Programme for Europe (EPE). The Working Group of Senior Governmental Officials "Environment for Europe" at its first session on 10-11 January 1994 undertook, in particular, a preliminary exchange of views on possible substantive topics and documents, apart from the EPE, which could justifiably be considered at the next Ministerial Conference, including monitoring of compliance with the ECE environmental conventions, and took specific decisions in that regard (paragraph 5 of decision F (48)).

6. At their special session on 12 January 1994, the Senior Advisers discussed the practicalities of extending the system of Country Environmental Performance Reviews to the entire ECE region. The Senior Advisers supported the extension by the ECE of the review system to ECE countries which are non-members of OECD and stressed the importance of the capacity-building process within the ECE which would include: cooperating with OECD for the review of Poland; convening a workshop, in cooperation with OECD, in Geneva from 26 to 27 May 1994, in order to familiarize ECE countries, non-members of OECD, with the details of the review system; strengthening the ECE secretariat and undertaking a pilot review of Estonia. The Senior Advisers agreed to make a final decision in 1996/97 on a full-scale ECE review programme including its financing (paragraph 7 of decision F (48)).

7. The Senior Advisers have made extensive use of workshops as a cost-effective and flexible form of cooperation (paragraph 8 of decision F (48)). Under their auspices six workshops have been organized, of which four were held jointly with UNEP on strengthening Environmental Management Capabilities in central and east European countries in the fields of: industrial accidents; legal and regulatory framework for environmental policies; institutional arrangements, coordination mechanisms and economic instruments for environmental management; environmental policy planning and management techniques; and financing of environmental policy.

8. The invitation contained in chapter 9 of Agenda 21 to carry out a feasibility study on convening a regional conference on transport and the environment was accepted by the Commission in paragraph 9 of decision F (48). The meeting of the Heads of delegations considered, in particular, a note by the secretariat on the progress made in carrying out a feasibility study on organizing a UN/ECE regional conference on transport and the environment, referred to in Agenda 21. While the organization of such a conference was generally supported, concern was expressed about the emphasis in the secretariat note on transport technology issues rather than on the broader policy aspects of the relationship between transport and the environment, such as changing consumption and production patterns. Environmental implications of establishing a pan-European transport network and environmental aspects related to air and inland waterways transport were also mentioned. Several delegations considered it more realistic to consider the adoption by the conference of an action programme rather than a convention.

9. The Executive Secretary has prepared a report on this subject in cooperation with member States, the Commission of the European Community and interested organizations. This study makes full use of the expertise of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies concerned, especially the Inland Transport Committee, the Senior Advisers on Environmental and Water Problems and the Committee on Energy. The Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution was also consulted.

10. Further progress was made in the implementation of the ECE region wide campaign Energy Efficiency 2000 and the development of Energy Efficiency Demonstration Zones aimed at enhancing trade and cooperation in energy-efficient, environmentally sound technologies and demand management practices between ECE member states with economies in transition and those with market economies. Business contacts have been developed at trade fairs, business briefings and seminars. Demonstration zones to develop local capacities in energy efficiency technology and policies are under development in Moscow and proposed in or near 16 other central, eastern and southern European cities (paragraph 11 of decision F (48)).

11. Pursuant to paragraphs 10 and 12 of decision F (48) the secretariat has given all due support to the implementation of the decision. Following the redeployment of personnel and resources to priority areas within the ECE in accordance with decision O (45), every effort has been made to fill vacant posts

in the secretariat responsible for the Commission's work in the field of environment, despite the temporary suspension of recruitment. The Senior Advisers at their special session on 21 October 1993 discussed and took decisions on additional resource requirements in particular to provide voluntary contributions in kind or in cash to strengthen the secretariat in servicing the new activities under the auspices of the Senior Advisers. The delegation of Norway has made - and the delegations of Canada, Italy and the Netherlands have expressed the readiness of their Governments to make - contributions to a new ECE Trust Fund for Environmental Performance Reviews and the "Environment for Europe" established for that purpose.